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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: SCENESETTER FOR FM MILOSOSKI'S MAY 6-7
VISIT TO WASHINGTON

LEVERAGING STRONG PRO-U.S. SENTIMENT

¶1. (SBU) FM Milososki's visit comes at a time when pro-U.S. sentiment in Macedonia is at its highest level in recent years. President Bush's solid support for Macedonia's NATO candidacy at Bucharest, coupled with subsequent U.S. actions to demonstrate our support for a fair and speedy resolution of the name dispute with Greece, have convinced the government, opposition and public that the U.S. remains Macedonia's single most important strategic partner. We can use the resulting leverage to press for progress on several important U.S. policy objectives in Macedonia and the region, including:

--moving quickly to resolve the name dispute with Greece in order to allow Macedonia to join Albania and Croatia in signing NATO accession protocols in July;

--ensuring free, fair and peaceful parliamentary elections on June 1 to demonstrate Macedonia's political maturity; and

--preventing any overt or implicit linkage between demarcation of Macedonia's border with Kosovo and Skopje's timing on recognition.

RESOLVE THE NAME DISPUTE, FOCUS ON NATO MEMBERSHIP

¶2. (SBU) Although stung by the Greek veto at Bucharest, both PM Gruevski and President Crvenkovski remain committed to a negotiated settlement of the name issue that preserves Macedonian redlines. Those redlines include no change in the description of the Macedonian nationality or language, no change in the constitutional name, and -- for Gruevski -- public approval of any settlement through a referendum. Macedonia's name negotiator, Ambassador Dimitrov, met with UN mediator Nimetz in the US this week to discuss the latter's ideas for a possible solution, including the scope of use of any new official name. Nimetz is expected to visit Skopje and Athens next week for follow-up discussions.

¶3. (SBU) We need to keep pressure on the Macedonian side to engage in the name talks with maximum flexibility in order to resolve the dispute in time to join Albania and Croatia in signing NATO accession protocols on July 9. A tall order

even under normal circumstances, that challenge is complicated by political campaign dynamics in advance of Macedonia's upcoming June 1 parliamentary elections. Irritants developing in Greek-Macedonian relations, including Athens's denial of overflight clearance for a Macedonian tourist airline, and recent hardline statements by Milososki in response to Greek actions and comments, could place additional obstacles in the way of a speedy agreement. FM Milososki needs to hear a firm message regarding the need for Skopje to exercise restraint in reacting to real or perceived provocations from Athens.

FREE, FAIR, AND PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

14. (SBU) Informal election campaigning and pre-election coalition-building already are well underway here, with the governing VMRO party enjoying a hefty lead in the polls. Rhetorical broadsides and mudslinging from all parties are adding to a heated pre-campaign atmosphere, and there have been some minor incidents of violence (property damage, no injuries) mainly between the two main ethnic Albanian parties.

15. (SBU) Milososki may try to place the blame for anticipated electoral irregularities on the ethnic Albanian parties. He should hear a clear message that we hold all parties responsible for the conduct of the elections. The government has a special responsibility to ensure that the elections are free, fair and peaceful, and that the conduct of the entire electoral process meets international standards. If the elections are seriously flawed, the GOM should expect that the Greeks and others could cite that shortcoming as a reason for not extending a NATO invitation to Macedonia anytime soon.

SKOPJE 00000299 002 OF 002

KOSOVO: DELINKING DEMARCATION AND RECOGNITION

16. (SBU) Skopje and Pristina formed in April a Joint Technical Commission (JTC) to demarcate their shared border on the basis of a 2001 agreement between Skopje and Belgrade (which Pristina grudgingly accepted, with USG prodding, per the Ahtisaari Plan). The JTC has met several times since then. Actual demarcation, a top priority for the GOM, could begin soon, despite strong Serb government objections to proceeding absent Belgrade's participation.

17. (SBU) The GOM is wary, however, that the Kosovars may refuse to demarcate some potentially contentious areas delineated in the 2001 agreement. Skopje has suggested it will not recognize Kosovo until those areas are actually demarcated. Although relations between Skopje and Pristina generally have been good, the Macedonian decision not to invite Kosovar President Sejdiu to a meeting of regional heads of state in Ohrid this week reportedly was perceived as a snub in Pristina and could complicate the demarcation process. Milososki should be urged to continue the positive momentum on border demarcation, while avoiding linkage between demarcation and a decision on recognition.

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